



**STEWARDSHIP/
PRAYER MINISTRIES**
MISSISSIPPI BAPTISTS



Stewarding Revival Guide

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Session 1 – Introduction

Part of God’s nature is to revive. When we speak of revival, we often approach the subject as something we must coax out of God. But God wants revival far more than we want revival. Our complicity in the church’s current state of affairs underscores the point. As the late Leonard Ravenhill often said, we live without revival because we are content to do so. The fault does not lie with God.

Therefore, it is necessary for us to change our hearts. This study of Scripture and history is an encouragement toward that change of heart. If it is God’s nature to revive, then we should invest ourselves in the good work of seeking and promoting revival among His body. And, as we draw near to Him, we should anticipate His reviving Spirit.

In case you need some convincing of God’s desire to revive and nurture those with just a little strength, consider these Scriptures:

“...A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench...” Matthew 12:20 (NKJV)

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)

“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.” Revelation 2:4-5 (NKJV)

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.” Revelation 3:1-3 (NKJV)

Further support for God’s reviving nature lies in the doctrine of God. The Bible clearly and repeatedly emphasizes the holiness of God. God is holy, holy, holy, and He wants a holy people for Himself. Leviticus 11:44 (NKJV) says, “For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy...” In the New Testament, Ephesians 5:27 (NKJV) says that God is working to present to Christ a “glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

Not only does He desire holiness for His people, but He has invested Himself in the work of transforming His people into the image of Christ. He gave Christ to death to eradicate our sin. He raised Christ from the dead to give us new life. He gave us His Spirit to bring newness and growth. God is not withholding Himself from us. We have all of Him that we really want. We just don’t want Him as we should. Therein lies the problem.

Historical studies show that revival often occurs during times of widespread backsliding. (After all, a church that is not backslidden has no need for revival.) That condition, backsliding, is our condition today. There have been great, widespread moves of God throughout our national history. We were born of revival fires from the First Great Awakening. The Second Great Awakening further shaped our nation. The Layman's Prayer Revival prepared the church for the horrors of the Civil War, and many scholars point to a movement of God in the early part of the 20th Century. There are pockets of revival scattered about in our time, but there is nothing that is happening on the scale of these former revivals. The widespread consensus is that the church in the western world has not seen any such awakening or revival in more than 100 years.

Why not us? Why not now?

In 18th Century Germany, Count Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf led a revival that God granted to a group of believers that lived on his estate. He had opened his property to a group of persecuted Christians in 1722, and they called the community Hernnhut, "The Lord's Watch." Early signs of revival began appearing five years later as Zinzendorf spoke on Christian unity during a meeting there in May 1727.

From that meeting, a prayer movement began, and Zinzendorf started praying earnestly for the young people in the community. On August 5, he and a few others spent an entire night in prayer for the youth. Revival came as the community observed the Lord's Supper eight days later, and the Moravian church was born.

As the revival continued, 48 adults committed together to cover 24 hours in prayer every day. Then children began leading their own prayer meetings. This movement, often called the 100-year prayer meeting, lasted a century.

The Moravian Christians focused on prayer and unity despite minor theological differences and began a missions movement that predated William Carey. They sent missionaries to India, Greenland, South Africa, and North America, among other locations. During their North American work, they greatly influenced a young John Wesley and helped spark the First Great Awakening. According to Zinzendorf, the rule for the Moravian community was this: "Hernhutt shall stand in unceasing love with all children of God in all churches, criticize none, take part in no quarrel against those of differing opinion, except to preserve for itself the evangelical purity, simplicity and grace."¹

Richard Owen Roberts provides a helpful definition of revival when he writes: "In using the term revival, I am speaking of an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results."² We certainly need this kind of revival now. What would happen if revival like this suddenly came to your church? How can we encourage revival and be ready to help sustain it when it comes?

1 Malcolm McDow and Alvin Reid, *Firefall 2.0: How God Has Shaped History through Revivals* (Wake Forest, NC: Gospel Advance Books, 2014), 169-70.

2 Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival!* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1993), 16.

These questions haunted me as a young pastor, and I began an obsessive study of the subject. I needed to understand revival. I needed to experience revival. In 2005, I began to see patterns and principles emerging from the Scripture. Certain revival principles were scattered throughout the biblical accounts of revival and the divine promises concerning revival. As I completed my studies toward a Doctor of Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I saw the same three principles figuring prominently in revivals throughout church history. The biblical principles I saw in Scripture were found to be predominant in the historical accounts. This study you are now reading is the result of revival lessons learned from the Bible and church history.

The three predominant revival principles I see are prayer (to include repentance and petition), missions (gospel proclamation), and Christian unity. It seems as though these elements appear in every instance of revival, and there are grand biblical promises featuring these principles as well. I do not present them to you as a formula or a recipe because formulas and recipes yield guaranteed results. God is sovereign, after all, and brings revival when and to whom He pleases. However, these principles seem to appear whenever revival appears. I present these principles to you as pillars on which revival rests. When these principles break down as features of a revival, revival collapses.

My conviction is that God will bring one more great revival before Christ comes to claim His church. He is preparing us to be spotless and radiant when we meet Him. This will require a great move of God, but that is the subject of another study. Over the course of this current study, we will consider each of the three principles, with prayer being the focus of two chapters. We need to understand these principles and their relationship to revival. We need to apply these principles so that, when God does send revival, we will be better prepared to sustain it. May God bless our efforts and prepare us to steward revival well.

QUESTIONS

1. How can we take courage from the fact that revival typically comes during times of great backsliding?
2. What is revival?
3. What are the three common principles of revival?
4. What would revival look like in your church?

Session 2 – Prayer, Part 1

Prayer is the first element of revival, and it is likely the most common element of revival. Every single revival account in my memory and awareness includes prayer as a prominent feature. Prayer is absolutely essential to revival. The church may have prayer without revival, but it can never have revival without prayer.

In the next session, we will consider prayers of petition in which the church asks God to bring revival to them. But this first session on prayer is even more critical because this session focuses on repentance. Those who think they can enjoy revival without repentance are deceiving themselves. In Amos 3:3, God rhetorically asks: “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (NKJV). The answer, obviously, is no. Walking together requires a lot of agreement on direction, duration, pace, purpose, and more. Disagreeing souls will not walk far together.

If God’s people are going to enjoy a walk with Him, they must agree with Him. We can’t go our own way. We have to go His way, the right way. This change of heart and mind to agree with God is the essence of repentance. Many may define repentance as confession of sin, but that’s only part. Repentance involves both confession of sin and an active turning away from sin. It is a change of life course.

The predominant word for repentance in the Greek New Testament is *metanoia*. According to Strong’s Concordance, this word means “change of mind, repentance” and refers also to a “change in the inner man.” The related verb is *metanoéō*. Again, according to Strong’s Concordance, this word literally means to “think differently afterwards.” Simply asking God for forgiveness even as you eagerly anticipate committing the same sin again is not repentance. True repentance is a change of perspective on sin. It occurs when someone is so grieved over sin that he or she not only asks for forgiveness but also, with God’s help, resolves to discontinue that sin.

Biblical examples of repentance include David and Zacchaeus. After committing adultery with Bathsheba and then committing murder when he ordered the death of her husband in battle, David was confronted by the prophet Nathan. With his sin exposed, David fell under conviction and composed Psalm 51, a psalm of repentance in which he confessed his sin and begged for God’s mercy and forgiveness. But in verse 10, he asks God to create a clean heart in him and renew a steadfast spirit in him. In verse 13, he pledges to lead God’s people in the ways of God, so that sinners would be converted to faith. With this Psalm, David is embarking on an entire change of course.

Luke 19:1-10 tells us the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector who had betrayed his own people by overcharging them for taxes to Rome and then pocketing the extra cash. He had become wealthy this way. Then Zacchaeus met Jesus. During their meeting that day, Zacchaeus said, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (NKJV). He said he was sorry, and then he made restitution. His confession cost him. That is repentance.

Let's return to Amos 3:3 as a reminder why repentance is critical to revival. The point made in that verse is that no two people can walk together unless they walk in agreement. If we want to walk with God, we must travel His path with Him. To that, I might add that you and I cannot honestly expect God to bless us if we are intent on going our own way instead of His way. To pursue a path contrary to God's is to pursue our own destruction. God will not bless us if we are pursuing destructive ends; if He did, He would be encouraging our destruction. Wouldn't our loving God withdraw the blessing of His presence from us so that we might feel pain, repent, and change direction before we go too far? In Hosea 2:6 (NKJV), God tells His people Israel that He will "hedge up (their) way with thorns," so that they would realize their error and return to Him.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, that famous revival verse, it is only when God's people humble themselves and pray and seek His face and "turn from their wicked ways" that He will hear them and forgive them and heal their land. God clearly expects His people to leave their sin and return to Him before He forgives and restores. Could it just be that our current problem is that we want to offer only a half-hearted apology to God so He will make us feel better? Could our problem be that we really have no intention to leave our sin?

But when God's people do seek Him above their own sinful desires, He has promised to hear. In Jeremiah 29:13 (NKJV), God says this to the Israelites in exile: "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." This is a good-faith promise on God's part. It is important that we understand the honesty of His promise and pursue Him wholeheartedly. When we invest ourselves completely in the pursuit of God, He will bless us. The total investment, however, is not easy or comfortable. Surely, this is why Leonard Ravenhill declared on a number of occasions: "The only reason we do not have revival is that we are content to live without it."

One student's act of repentance was the flashpoint of revival at Asbury College and Theological Seminary in 1970. At a mandatory Tuesday morning chapel service, the professor who was scheduled to speak showed up with nothing to say. He explained his problem to the student body and asked if any of them had a word to share in chapel. A young man, his name lost to history, stood among his peers and confessed that he had been living a lie on campus. All of his Christian devotion had been false. Then he added, "But last night, I met the Lord." When he made this confession, the Spirit of God fell.

The students were overwhelmed by a sense of the manifest presence of God. Many fell to their knees. Some fell face-down on the floor. The chapel filled as other students came late to the meeting. Each newcomer reported a deep sense of conviction. The chapel remained full 24 hours a day until the weekend. Students lingered together in worship, continuing without food and sleep. The college president suspended classes that week as God's Spirit moved throughout the entire campus. From that Tuesday morning in February 1970, the Asbury Revival continued until the term ended in June. Then the revival spread as students dispersed for the summer. Smaller revivals occurred wherever the students went at the end of the school year.³

³ Lewis A. Drummond, *Ripe for Harvest: The Role of Spiritual Awakening in Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 40-3.

In the Asbury Revival case study, one act of contrition from an anonymous student sparked revival. Another glimpse of revival history, this time into the Welsh Revival of the early twentieth century, also illustrates the relationship between repentance and revival. Evan Roberts was 26 years old in 1904 when he became the leading figure of that revival. In meeting after meeting, he confronted listeners with these four requirements for revival: first, repent of all unconfessed sin; second, stop any questionable habit; third, immediately obey the leadership of the Holy Spirit; and fourth, publicly confess Christ.⁴ The patterns of repentance in his four requirements are obvious. Make confession, discontinue sin, and follow Christ. As Roberts preached this message, revival continued to spread.

There are echoes of Roberts's four requirements across time. Generally noticed patterns of revivals throughout history indicate that these movements of God begin only after some of His people recognize the need for revival and repent of their sin. Again, repentance necessarily involves not only remorse for sin but also a change of direction. And repentance must apply to specific sins and to the sinful condition itself. In other words, we do not cherry pick sins when we repent, repenting from some sins but conveniently ignoring others. Instead, we repent of the sins that are causing difficulty in our lives and also the sins we secretly cherish. This kind of honest and total repentance breaks down all sin barriers to revival. Having repented, therefore, the people of God exercise obedience and then begin to act in faith. Taking God at His word, they follow His direction, even if it makes no human sense. Whether the spiritual activity just described is personal and isolated or is more widespread, the people who practice these things walk in renewal.⁵

Before leaving the subject of repentance, we should consider the need to repent for corporate sins. Just as individuals sin, groups of individuals sin. Churches sin. Nations sin. While this may seem foreign to the American notion of rugged individualism, corporate sin is a thoroughly biblical concept. Isaiah identified with the sin of his people when he saw God high and lifted up. Daniel expressed repentance for the sins of Judah. David took action to reverse a national curse brought on by the murderous treachery of King Saul. The high priest of Israel annually offered a sacrifice for the sins of the entire nation. Similarly, Jesus, our high priest, offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. It could be argued that we are never more like God than when we stand before God on behalf of others and plead for His mercy.

Speaking through the prophet Joel, God urges the Kingdom of Judah to consecrate a fast and call a solemn assembly, which every person should attend. Chapter 2 of this short book says the elders and the children – even nursing babies – should come to the assembly so that they all might repent of their national sin. The call for repentance was so far-reaching that brides and grooms were to leave their wedding festivities to attend the assembly. The priests were to lead the people in mourning over sin.

Acts of corporate repentance have solid biblical precedent.

That being said, which corporate sins are a stain on your family? On your church? On your nation? Is it

⁴ McDow and Reid, 251-52.

⁵ Ibid.

not time to seriously deal with God over these sins as well as your own personal sin? In Joel 2:12 (NKJV), the Lord tells His people, “Turn to Me with all your heart...” In the following verse, He tells them, “Return to the Lord your God...” So twice in two verses God encourages a turning to Him. According to verse 14, when God’s people turn or return to Him this way, He “will turn and relent (from His wrath), and leave a blessing behind Him...”

QUESTIONS

1. What is the New Testament Greek word for revival and its meaning?
2. Why is the resolve to depart from sin critical to revival? Can you name some biblical examples of people who displayed authentic repentance?
3. Why is corporate sin a problem, and how may it be resolved?
4. According to Joel 2:12-14, what will God do when His people turn from their sin and back to Him?

Session 3 – Prayer, Part 2

In the last session, we began considering prayer as a critical element of revival – and perhaps the most salient element of revival – throughout history. We will continue that discussion now, but our focus shifts from prayers of repentance to prayers of petition in which we ask God to bring revival to us. When we ask God for something, we are petitioning Him. Contemporary Christians would be foolish to discount the importance of petitioning God for revival. Wherever revival has flourished, prayer has preceded it. To neglect prayer is to reject revival.

Buttressing this point is James 4:2 (NKJV), which includes this simple statement: “Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” How does this verse apply to revival? The obvious answer is that if we do not care enough about revival to even ask for it, we should not expect God to provide it. We cannot complain about the absence of revival in our time if we have never even bothered to ask God for it. James would say we don’t have revival because we don’t ask for revival. We don’t bother to do the hard work of repenting and purifying our motives to honestly and earnestly plead with God. Truth be told, we just don’t care that much about it.

How much do we care about any aspect of God’s work? Our prayer lives tell the story.

If a stranger to Christianity visited your church, how important would he believe prayer is to you? Churches typically include prayer at many points in their worship services, but the prayers often seem rote or perfunctory. We pray at certain moments in the service because that is when we are scheduled to do so. Or we pray in moments of transition during the service so various worship leaders can leave and approach the platform while all heads are bowed and all eyes are closed. These prayers serve a purpose. They make services seamless. But how often do we pray because we believe it is absolutely critical? Do we pray because we are absolutely dependent on God?

Leonard Ravenhill still challenges the church with these words:

We have not yet resisted unto blood in prayer; nay, we “do not even get a sweat on our souls,” as Luther put it. We pray with a “take-it-or-leave-it” attitude; we pray chance prayers; we offer that which costs us nothing! We have not even “strong desire.” We rather are fitful, moody and spasmodic.

The only power that God yields to is that of prayer. We will write about prayer-power, but not fight while in prayer. A title, undeniably true of the Church today, would be “We Wrestle Not!” We will display our gifts, natural or spiritual; we will air our views, political or spiritual; we will preach a sermon or write a book to correct a brother in doctrine. But who will storm hell’s stronghold? Who will say the devil nay? Who will deny himself good food or good company or good rest that hell may gaze upon him wrestling, embarrassing demons, liberating captives, depopulating hell, and leaving, in answer to his travail, a stream of blood-washed souls? ⁶

6 Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1959), 60.

If Ravenhill's words contain any truth, the church must wrestle with some difficult questions. Namely, what is our primary value? The glory of God? Or comfort? Additionally, what level of discomfort must we reach before we are willing to invest ourselves entirely in prayer? Have we chosen, as Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:4, to live as "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"?

Jeremiah Lanphier, who provided the spark for the Layman's Prayer Revival, was a man who knew the church in his day had to either pray or perish.

By the 1840s in America, the positive effects of the Second Great Awakening had waned. At best, the church was stagnant. But hopes for revival prompted prayer in the mid-1850s, with initial signs of revival cropping up in various places in 1855.

In the fall of 1857, God placed a burden for revival on Lanphier's heart. Lanphier, a 40-year-old businessman in New York City, responded by calling New York's business community to prayer at noon every Wednesday. His first meeting was set for September 23, 1857. No one came. So Lanphier, undeterred, began to pray alone.

By the end of that lunch hour on September 23, six others had joined him in a spontaneous prayer meeting. The next Wednesday brought 20 people to the prayer meeting, and the following week brought nearly 40. At that point, the attenders all agreed to meet for prayer every day.

More than 100 people attended the October 14 meeting. Lost people in the meeting fell under Holy Spirit conviction. Daily meetings filled three large rooms that month. Without any coordination, and without the benefit of television or social media, prayer meetings began all over the city. These meetings grew. Within six months, 50,000 people met for prayer each day in New York City. (Yes, that New York City.) Thousands were praying in other cities as well, including Chicago.

Many reported marvelous answers to prayer. These answers included the salvations of people for whom others had prayed for years and also included the miraculous healings of others. Even sailors on ships in New York Harbor fell under conviction before they even reached the port. Lingering effects of this revival continued into the 1860s as revival touched soldiers in both Union and Confederate camps during the war.⁷

It all started with one man's determination to pray. He was no pastor, but he understood the need of his time. And he was obedient to the leadership of God. As he obeyed, God blessed; and revival spread through secular society instead of the church's structural program. Perhaps it was this revival that prepared the church to withstand the ravages of a war that tore the country apart in the next decade. All it took was one man who heard and obeyed the call of God.

As demonstrated in the Layman's Prayer Revival, prayer is critical to revival. Richard Owen Roberts writes:

⁷ McDow and Reid, 229-36.

Prayerlessness must be linked with carelessness.... The very heart of the biblical teaching on prayer is fervency and consistency. When men are so earnest that they cannot live without a desired blessing, God is pleased with their attitude.... Halfhearted praying doesn't even produce halfhearted results. It is worse than nothing. In fact, it is an affront against a gracious God.... God deals earnestly with people and requires people to deal earnestly with Him. ⁸

Are people around you praying for revival? Join them! Is no one around you praying for revival? Don't lose heart. Prayer for revival has to start somewhere with someone. It may as well be you. Do not be discouraged by the prayerless condition of many in the church and in the culture. God often answers the prayers of the few so that He may bless the many.

The Hebrides Revival that transformed communities in Scotland in the late 1940s and early 1950s began with two homebound sisters who could do nothing but pray. Peggy Smith was 84 and blind in 1949, and her sister Christine was 82 and crippled by arthritis. But they were broken by their church's powerless condition. As God directed them, they resolved to pray together at home through the night two or three times each week. Then they called their pastor to pray, and he called the church to pray. God responded by bringing revival to their island. ⁹

Revival does not require everyone to pray. If everyone was praying for revival, there would already be revival. It does not take everyone, but it does take someone. Will you be that someone in your church and community? What can we do to encourage our churches to pray for revival?

QUESTIONS

1. What is a prayer of petition?
2. Using James 4:2, briefly describe the relationship between prayer and revival.
3. How does the story of Jeremiah Lanphier encourage you to pray?
4. Are you willing to find someone to join you in regular prayer for revival?

⁸ Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival!* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 2012), 148-9.

⁹ Calvary Southbury, "The Story of the Hebrides Revival," www.calvarysouthbury.com/hebrides/

Session 4 – Missions

“Always” can be a problematic word, and I understand that. The word lends itself to some broad, definitive statements that are nearly impossible to prove. For instance, we may say that someone “always” does something without really believing that person takes the same course of action at each opportunity to do so. That being said, however, revival always includes and leads to the proclamation of God’s word. Or, put another way, God’s word is always a prominent feature of revival.

Missions is the second element of revival. Some may prefer to label it as “evangelism,” or “gospel proclamation” as a more general term. But I choose to call this element “missions” because this terminology, in my understanding, best describes the church’s heart to participate with God in order to complete the objective of making disciples – wherever those disciples may be made. It brings to mind the Great Commission. So, for the purpose of this study, we will use the word “missions” to refer to the church’s effort to make disciples locally and globally.

Even in Old Testament times, the reading and proclamation of God’s word occupied a prominent place in times of revival. For instance, the people of Israel stood outside all day while Ezra read from the Law. Nineveh repented when Jonah preached God’s message throughout the city. And King Josiah was cut to the heart when he read the hidden scroll that had been discovered during Temple renovation. Since the beginning of the New Testament church, this proclamation of God’s word has had the gospel as its central feature. God’s word is still shared, but there is a new dynamic. Whether God’s people are engaged in evangelism or missions, sharing the gospel of Jesus is absolutely essential to this revival-time effort.

And what is the gospel? Biblically speaking, the gospel is the good news that sinful human beings, because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, can find freedom from sin and judgment by placing their faith in Him. Paul summarizes the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-14 (NKJV):

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures....

The critical pieces of the gospel are all included in this passage. Christ died, suffering punishment for the sins of others, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. He was buried. He rose from the dead, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Acceptance of this truth leads to salvation. The gospel message is nothing more and nothing less than this.

Now, let’s return our attention to revival and pause to consider a question. Why does God bring revival to His church? I ask the question for a good reason. We can better align our purpose with God’s if we rightly understand His purpose in bringing revival.

You may be familiar with Acts 1:8. If you have been in a Southern Baptist church at any time in recent memory, there is a good chance that you have heard this verse quoted by a pastor, a missionary, a denominational leader, or a missions volunteer. In this verse, the risen Jesus is giving final instructions to His disciples. He tells them to wait in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit comes to live in them and empower them for His work. Then He says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (NKJV)

Just pretend you are absolutely unfamiliar with this verse. Pretend you’ve never read it or heard it from anyone. Pretend this is your first interaction with Acts 1:8. Reread it again without any preconceived notions about its meaning or application.

After reading this verse for the “first” time, please answer this question: for what reason does God give His Spirit to the church? As I read the verse for the “first” time, there is an answer that seems obvious to me. God gives His Spirit to the church so the church will be His witnesses. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me....” He sends the Spirit to empower His people for witnessing.

Yet, today, we live in a church culture that prays for an outpouring of God’s Spirit so we can have a good time when we get together on Sundays. That ought not be. We are attempting to misappropriate the blessing of God. We are hoarding the blessing for ourselves.

I fear that such misappropriation will make God less likely to honor our requests for the blessing.

Imagine a boy who asks his father for lunch money for the week. His dad responds by giving him enough money to buy nice lunches for himself and also for his younger siblings. Receiving such a large sum, more money than he has ever held, makes the boy very happy. He goes away with a smile.

The next week, the son asks again, and the father gives him the same amount. But on the third week, after hearing complaints of scant lunches – and sometimes none at all – from his younger children, the father decides to investigate. He learns that his son, whom he appointed as the steward of the lunch money, has been taking the bulk of that cash and spending it on candy and games for himself.

How quickly will the father bless his son with more money after discovering such waste and selfishness? Won’t the father find another steward to take care of his children?

When we focus on ourselves and our own pleasure instead of others who will perish without Jesus, we are ignoring the desire of God that Jesus made so clear. This brings us out of alignment with God, into sin, and into need of repentance so that our unhindered fellowship with Him may be restored. By focusing on ourselves instead of His glory and then on the need of others, we are actually working to circumvent the blessing we say we desire. Hoarding spiritual blessings hinders revival and does not encourage it.

According to my understanding of Acts 1:8, God delivers spiritual blessings to us to empower us for gospel sharing. Enjoyment of these blessings should lead to more gospel sharing. Therefore, missions is the reason for and the intended fruit of revival.

The life, work, and influence of David Brainerd illustrate the close relationship between revival and missions.¹⁰ Brainerd was born in 1718 and died of tuberculosis in 1747. He was a product of the First Great Awakening in the American colonies and became an influencer of the modern missionary movement.

He experienced a personal spiritual renewal when he was 21 years old and subsequently entered Yale to prepare for ministry. While there, he experienced the effects of the First Great Awakening. But in a moment of pride, the young man commented that one of his professors had “no more grace than a chair.” As you might imagine, the seminary professor did not take kindly to the comparison which called his salvation into question. So Brainerd was expelled from Yale, and this cut off his only avenue for ordination and pastoral service.

This development, along with his illness, drove him into the wilderness to minister to the Indians. He served as a missionary to the northeastern tribes for four years before his death. And when tuberculosis finally forced him off the field, he retired to the home of famed revivalist Jonathan Edwards. Edwards’s daughter, Jerusha, cared for Brainerd until his death in their home. Then Jerusha died of tuberculosis four months later.

Reflecting on all of this, Edwards called his experience with Brainerd a “gracious dispensation of providence” and published Brainerd’s diary as *The Life of Brainerd*. The diary (an account of missions fueled by the Great Awakening) has been an instrument of God to further missions for nearly 300 years. Among those influenced by the diary have been: William Carey, David Livingstone, Andrew Murray, and Jim Elliot.

Brainerd struggled with tuberculosis, loneliness, depression, doubt, and the temptation to abandon his ministry. But he held true as long as he was physically able to continue, often battling the punishing northeastern winter to carry the gospel forward. The reviving work of God compelled him to continue.

God used Edwards at Yale to influence Brainerd. God used Brainerd, in his death, to influence Edwards. Edwards published Brainerd’s diary, which has inspired hundreds of missionaries who have touched millions of lives. This story illustrates the notion that revival does not exist for itself. It blesses the people of God, but the intent of the blessing is to move and empower the people of God to spread the gospel of God. God intends revival to lead to gospel proclamation, which then tends to influence further renewal.

If missions is the reason for and the intended fruit of revival, why should God send revival to our churches? Are we using His gift in the way He intended? Or are we hoarding everything we can? Make sure you are properly stewarding the blessing of God.

¹⁰ Piper, John. “Oh, That I May Never Loiter on My Heavenly Journey! Reflections on the Life and Ministry of David Brainerd.” <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/oh-that-i-may-never-loiter-on-my-heavenly-journey>.

If, however, you are not now involved in the work of disciple making, if you are not participating with God in His great global mission in some way, it is time to get involved. When you are involved, then you can expect God to give you as much spiritual power as you need (and probably more than you need) whenever you ask for it. If your church is focused on its own need instead of the needs of a perishing community and world, it's time to mobilize the church for mission. Then, you have every reason to request and expect God to give you spiritual power. Until that time, however, you should expect nothing but spiritual anemia.

There are many ways to engage your community and engage the world. There are many evangelism tools and many mission opportunities. The important thing is to find the tools and opportunities that resonate with you or that fit your church. Certainly there is at least one that matches your particular gifting and interest. Ask God to lead you to it. Search for it. Use it. And ask God to bless you as He uses you to bless others.

QUESTIONS

1. Can you name some biblical examples of the proclamation of God's word during revival?
2. What is the gospel?
3. Why does God bring spiritual blessing to the church? How does this relate to revival?
4. How did revival and missions impact each other in Brainerd's experience?

Session 5 – Unity

Our study ends in this final session with a focus on the third element of revival, Christian unity. This unity is absolutely needed in our churches today. A lack of Christian unity may be our greatest area of weakness at the moment and may, consequently, be the greatest hindrance to revival that we face.

In almost every single church where I go to preach or teach on the subject of revival, I find people who are praying for God to bring spiritual awakening. And in many of our churches, there is a strong focus on missions and gospel outreach. What seems to be most lacking, however, is a spirit of love and unity. We appeal to God to give Himself to us, but we fail to give ourselves to each other in Christian love. Too often, the old adage is true, “I will love you, but I don’t have to like you.” Honestly, I’m not sure how that works.

But Christian unity is a hallmark of revivals past. It certainly is prevalent in Scripture. Acts chapter 2 tells us that all of the disciples were together in spirit and in prayer when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Aside from this positive example and the clear commands from God that we should love one another (as if these commands were not enough), why is unity important to revival?

Look at Psalm 133.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!² It is like the
precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on
the edge of his garments.³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore. (NKJV)

This short psalm begins with the familiar words, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” And then it goes into some descriptive language to tell us how pleasant that unity is. It is as sacred and precious as the holy anointing oil that ran down Aaron’s head and beard when he was ordained as the first high priest of Israel. And that unity of God’s family is also as refreshing and life-giving as the dew on Mt Hermon that gathers and flows down to water the mountains below.

But all of that language about the oil on Aaron’s head and the dew on top of Hermon is beside the point of the psalm. To be sure, they are good words and divinely-inspired words, but they are merely descriptive words that serve to illustrate how good and pleasant unity is among the brothers. They do not form the main point of the psalm. In fact, you could draw parentheses around those descriptive phrases and lift them completely out of the psalm, and the remaining text of Psalm 133 would still communicate the main point.

So let’s do that. Let’s lift those descriptive phrases out of the psalm and forget, for a moment, that they are part of the text. Now, slide the beginning and the ending of psalm together so we can read without interruption. Then we can see the main point of the psalm. If we do that, this is what the psalm says: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!... For there the LORD commanded the blessing— Life forevermore.” God is so pleased when His family lives together in unity

that He commands a blessing wherever such unity exists. So what is the blessing that God commands wherever His people live together in unity? Life forevermore. Or, in other words, perpetual revival. Wherever God's people live together in unity, life bubbles up like a never-ending spring of water. It flows from the source and gives life to all of its surroundings. It refreshes and revives everything.

You may object and say, "Well, I've never seen that happen." And that's just my point. We are lacking in the area of unity.

Notice that the psalmist does not say God merely permits or allows the blessing of perpetual revival wherever the family of God is unified. That's not what David says at all. Instead, he says God commands this blessing. He commands the blessing.

Throughout this study, I have hesitated to present these elements of revival as a recipe or a formula. Recipes and formulas, when they are followed, yield guaranteed results. In our study of revival, however, we must remember that God is sovereign. He chooses when and where to initiate revival. I present these elements of revival to help the church prepare for revival and to encourage the church to seek revival. I present nothing as a guarantee. BUT, as I read Psalm 133, it sure seems like a guarantee! God commands the blessing wherever His people are united in faith and love in Christ.

Yet we are quick to subdivide into camps and be suspicious of one another. Sometimes these subdivisions are substantive, and key doctrine is at stake. In situations like that, I would agree, separation is advisable. Most times, though, these divisions arise from personal differences and preferences. We must repent of this sin. Elevating personal preference to first place in the church is idolatry. God's desire is for His people to be one, and that should be our aim. AW Tozer said, "The Holy Ghost comes because we are a united people, not to make us a united people.... Unity is necessary for the outpouring of the Spirit of God."¹¹

Bertha Smith's story of the Shangtung Revival powerfully illustrates how critical unity is to revival.¹² Smith was a Southern Baptist missionary to China during a period of civil unrest that eventually led to the Communist Revolution in that country. She reports the beginning of desire for revival in 1920. Since that spark of desire appeared in 1920, prayer for revival continued a few years.

Unrest in the country also persisted, and societal conditions degraded. In 1927, the American consulate urged missionaries to leave their posts for the safety afforded them in Chefoo. In this new city, they began to pray together for direction in the crisis and also for the healing of Ida Culpepper, a missionary who was suffering from optic neuritis.

Culpepper was in danger of completely losing her eyesight, so the missionaries felt an urgent need for her healing. Marie Monsen, a Lutheran missionary, began to lead them in prayer for Culpepper's healing. After a season of repentance, the missionaries met together with Culpepper to pray.

¹¹ A. W. Tozer, "Unity that Brings Revival," The Body of Christ Youtube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIXOrVgr6kc>.

¹² Bertha Smith, *Go Home and Tell* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1965), 12-39.

In that prayer meeting, as Smith was about to lay her hands on Culpepper and pray, she was suddenly convicted of an old grudge she had harbored against another missionary present. Smith immediately confessed the sin in front of everyone there and asked her colleague to forgive her. She received forgiveness for that sinful attitude and then prayed for Culpepper.

God healed Ida Culpepper. When they witnessed firsthand the powerful answer to prayer, the missionaries became convicted of their failure to pray for the lost Chinese with the same urgency. So they began in earnest to pray for God's work among the Chinese.

That spirit of prayer and conviction and repentance continued. When they were able to return to their posts, the missionaries noticed a spirit of conviction prevailing over the Chinese people to whom they were ministering. Momentum continued to build until revival swept the entire province of Shangtung.

Every church in the province experienced the effects of revival. The junior college became a seminary. Opium addicts were saved and delivered from addiction. Feuding people made peace with one another. Some people were healed of disease. Others were delivered from demonic possession. Many farmers became preachers. The Shangtung Revival helped prepare the Chinese church to withstand and flourish despite the Communist Revolution of 1945-1949.

This story shows us the power of Christian unity, the negative effects of grieving the Holy Spirit, and the crucial (often overlooked) relationship of unity to revival. These lessons are important to remember. We cannot simultaneously be in close fellowship with God and at odds with God's people. We deceive ourselves when we think otherwise.

But what does this unity look like? Certainly, it cannot mean that everyone simply abandons conviction for the sake of like-mindedness. Tozer has a helpful description of what Christian unity is and is not.¹³ According to him, Christian unity is not forcing everyone to have identical theological views about secondary issues. Nor is it a situation wherein people are so passive in belief that they compromise all of their convictions. Instead, Christian unity occurs when God's people are all united in: determination to glorify God alone, absorption in God's work, desire to see God's wonders, prayer for God's outpouring, and resolution to put away forbidden things.

Essentially, Christian unity happens when we all have the freedom to be who we are in Christ and are comfortable letting other people be who they are in Christ. We find agreement in those things that are most important and love each other despite differences on secondary and tertiary matters. It does not require anyone to surrender matters of prime importance; instead, it insists that we unite on matters of prime importance and love one another despite differences we may have on lesser matters.

Christian unity looks an awful lot like descriptions of life among the Moravians at Herrnhut, which we covered in the first session of this study. At Herrnhut, in fact, can be found each of the three elements of revival. They resolved to love one another despite disagreement on minor issues. When convicted about the spiritual poverty among the youth, some resolved to pray. Others joined in prayer, and that became the 100-year prayer meeting from which was born a global missionary movement. All three elements

13 Tozer, "Unity that Brings Revival."

combined in a revival that lasted a century and impacted the world for Christ. How in the world can we be content to live without this now?

Does your church look like Herrnhut? Does your family? If the answer to either of these questions is negative, what hinders you from living in unity? Let me leave you with the words of the Apostle Paul from Romans 12:18 (NKJV), "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

QUESTIONS

1. In Psalm 133, how are revival and unity linked?
2. What sin hindered the missionaries' prayers in Bertha Smith's story?
3. List some things that unity is and is not, according to A.W. Tozer.
4. Should we ever surrender matters of key Christian doctrine for the sake of unity?

Conclusion

As we have studied Scripture together and examined each of these elements of revival within historical context, one notion has insisted on being noticed. God is not at fault for the fact that we do not live in days of revival. But I believe He greatly desires for His people to enjoy spiritual newness and power. In time, He will bring this revival to His church. It may come at a time when we can do nothing but look to Him. Hard times may force it. But it will come.

Perhaps, if we begin to practice what we have learned in this study, God will bring revival to us without us having to face such great difficulty. At the very least, however, by practicing what we have learned, we can be better prepared to steward revival when it comes. We can be prepared to help revival last longer.

All revivals are opposed. They all endure criticism and face scrutiny. They all suffer the work of Satan who labors to counterfeit the work of God or to seize God's work for his own twisted purpose. And all revivals eventually end. Some end sooner than others. Let's resolve now to be good stewards of revival so that the revival God brings us will be long lasting and powerful.

When revival comes, let's be found ready. Until then, let's love one another and pray as we engage ourselves in the mission of God. In so doing, perhaps we can hasten and encourage the coming blessing.



